

Coins

Among hobbyists, currency remains a topical favorite

By Roger Boye

PAPER MONEY remains a popular collectors' item, judging by the number of currency-related questions from readers. Here are answers to some recent queries.

Q—I'm starting a collection of \$1 Federal Reserve notes, but can't find any dated 1975 or 1976. Were the government printing presses working in those years?—L. B., Munster, Ind.

A—Yes, the government did print currency in 1975 and 1976. Under current Treasury Department policy, the series year on currency changes when a new Treasury secretary takes office. All \$1 bills made from July, 1974, to early 1977 (during Secretary William E. Simon's term) were series 1974. The \$1 bills currently printed are series 1977, the year W. Michael Blumenthal succeeded Simon as Treasury chief.

Q—My husband has found a \$5 bill without the words "In God We Trust" on the back side. It's a Federal Reserve note, series 1950-A. Did they make a mistake at the mint?—A. W., Chicago.

A—The motto first was used on the series 1963 \$5 Federal Reserve notes. None of the series 1950-A bills carries the motto. By the way, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing produces currency, not the Bureau of the Mint, which makes coins and medals.

Q—I have a \$1 bill, series 1977, with an ink smear that runs from the "o" in "Chicago" through the serial number. Does the bill have any added worth to a collector?—M. K., Itasca.

A—Bills with authentic ink smudges, smears, or runs are usually collectors' items, with the value depending on the prominence of the error. For example, a \$1 bill with an ink smear obliterating most of Washington's face would retail for about \$10 in very fine condition, according to a currency catalog.

Q—I'm in the habit of checking the currency in my wallet while waiting in the grocery checkout line. Today I made quite a discovery: The back-side design on my brand new \$5 bill is upside down, compared with the front-side design. Does this happen very often?—M. W., Chicago.

A—No. You have an unusual item that is probably worth at least 10 times face value to a collector of currency errors.

Q—I have a \$1 bill serial number H12411111A. Is this bill with the same number repeated six times worth more than the common-run bills?—T. K., Arlington Heights.

A—Searching for bills with odd and interesting serial numbers is a fascinating hobby for some people. Your bill might be worth a small premium to such a collector.

However, these collectors are generally interested in even more exotic number combinations, such as all digits alike, very low numbers, numbers that read the same both ways, numbers in blocks (like 22445588), poker hand numbers, or mismatched numbers (the serial number appears twice on a modern U.S. bill, and once in a great while, the numbers don't match).